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Thank you for visiting [www.mass.gov/flu](http://www.mass.gov/flu) to learn more about the H1N1 (swine) flu. As you've probably heard, we're expecting an especially challenging flu season this year in Massachusetts and across the country. I'm writing to let you know what we're doing at the state level to get ready – and just as important, what you can do to keep yourself and your family safe and healthy this flu season.

Under the leadership of Governor Patrick and Secretary Bigby, we have been working with our partners at the local, state and federal level to prepare the Commonwealth to take steps to reduce the spread and severity of illness, as well as minimize the disruptive effects of both seasonal and H1N1 (swine) flu.

While there is no reason for alarm, it is important to stay informed as the seasonal and H1N1 flu situation evolves. We will continue to provide the most up-to-date information both here on this website and on our [blog](#), and we encourage you to check back often for the latest information.

In the meantime, there are steps that everyone can take to help prevent getting or spreading any type of flu, and to take care of loved ones who are sick with the flu:

1. **Stay informed.** We have a full range of information on how to stay healthy this flu season, and how to care for yourself or a loved one who gets sick, at [www.mass.gov/flu](http://www.mass.gov/flu). Learn more about the status of flu in Massachusetts on our [blog](#). For information on the outbreak at the national level, please visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) flu [website](#).
2. **Get vaccinated.** To stay healthy this flu season, we encourage everyone to get a seasonal flu shot. And we encourage everyone in [H1N1 high risk groups](#) – including children and young adults, and pregnant women – to get an H1N1 flu shot once that vaccine becomes available.
3. **Practice good health hygiene.** You can stop the spread of flu by taking the following actions:

- Practice good "cough and sneeze etiquette" by coughing or sneezing into a tissue, or into your elbow instead of into your hands.

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- Wash your hands often with soap and water, especially after you cough or sneeze. Alcohol-based hand cleaners are also effective.
4. **Care for those with the flu:** Like seasonal flu, H1N1 flu will cause fever, cough, runny nose, sore throat, runny nose body aches and other symptoms for about 4 days. In most cases these symptoms – while unpleasant – will be relatively mild.
- If you get sick, stay home from work or school, and limit contact with others to avoid infecting them
  - For some people, flu symptoms can be more serious. These individuals include people with underlying chronic disease like diabetes or asthma; or who have neurological disorders; or who are pregnant. Such individuals should promptly call their health care provider as soon as flu symptoms develop, to discuss if antiviral medications or other treatment is needed.
  - We discourage use of the hospital emergency room for treatment of flu symptoms unless directed by a health care provider.

Thank you again for visiting [www.mass.gov/flu](http://www.mass.gov/flu), and for your help in spreading the message about prevention this flu season.

Sincerely,

John Auerbach  
Commissioner